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WALTER S. HINCHMAN, PRESIDENT

A. B. DE MILLE, SEC'Y AND TREAS

SAMUEL THURBER, EDITOR

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ORAL COMPOSITION

A COURSE IN ETHICS FOR HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS

The time will come, without doubt, when every high school will offer its pupils an opportunity to study some of the fundamental principles of Psychology, Ethics, Economics and Sociology. The majority of high school graduates finish their education with the twelfth grade. They miss, therefore, the study of subjects which are of the greatest value in their everyday living. But until this combination course becomes a part of the high-school curriculum the teacher of English has at his command a tremendous wealth of material for his own work. Every teacher of literature often becomes a teacher of Ethics. In fact, artistic appreciation of certain pieces of literature is incomplete and impossible without an understanding of the moral issues involved. But many of us fail to appreciate the still greater opportunity for ethical teaching by means of oral and written composition. The ethics course suggested in the following pages is intended as material for oral or written themes.

Most teachers would agree that the principal secret of good composition work is interest. We all express ourselves most effectively on those subjects into which we have put our hearts as well as our minds. Religious educators agree that youth is the time of the most vital religious experiences. Young people are immediately interested in any question of right and wrong. The boy who has seldom prepared his oral themes on time has definite ideas, ready for the class, as to whether a "strike" is right or wrong. He has a carefully-worked-out financial scheme to explain how much rent a landlord is morally justified in charging.

Moreover, he brings to the class not only his own ideas but also those of the older members of the family. He has conducted an "open forum" around the dinner table to gather his material; and the combined wisdom of the newspaper, the reference-book and the household has led him to a sane, wholesome conclusion.

In the use of this material there might be a variety of methods. One very simple plan is the use of an outline. This plan has been followed successfully for several semesters in one high school. This is far more satisfactory than a textbook, for it compels the pupil to hunt his own material and to do his own thinking. Furthermore, every teacher may make his own outline, and he may revise it each year as his own ideas or the needs of his pupils change.

Some of the suggested topics are best treated in written themes. Papers on "The Morals of Dress," "Are Americans Amusement-crazy" or "The Secret of Happiness" make excellent reading for teacher and pupils. The most unpromising class will do some very genuine thinking in a period spent in listening to what some of the members consider "The Gravest Moral Danger of Our Times."

Some of the questions, such as matters of health or economic problems which require reading, should be assigned as special topics for oral reports in class. For the more difficult ones, the teacher should allow several days for preparation. The simpler topics, on which pupils have well-defined ideas, may be announced for general class discussion. A few of the questions are excellent subjects for debates.

For the reference work required for the more difficult questions, the school library should own or borrow a collection of suitable texts. The bibliography which follows the outline suggests some of the most useful ones. If the pupils are used to reference work, they can find their own material, with only a little help from the teacher. On the other hand, it is wise, now and then, to give definite references with an assignment.

Against one danger the teacher should be on guard. When there are two sides to a question, the pupil should see both sides. Such questions as trusts, immigration restriction, or free-trade should be studied from both sides or omitted. Above all there should be no attempt to settle these questions. The pupil should be interested, well-informed, eager to read what he can find; but if he makes final judgment, and "pigeon-holes" his opinion when he is seventeen, we

are defeating our aim. On most moral questions, of course, we would agree there is but one right and one wrong.

The amount of time spent depends on the interest of the class and the method of using the outline. By careful planning, the work can be covered in two or three weeks. One hundred and twenty pupils who did the work this semester were asked to make suggestions as to changes and improvements in the course. Of the hundred and twenty, one hundred and ten suggested first that more time be spent on the ethics course. The specific suggestions as to the amount of time varied from a month to a semester. On the whole, three or four weeks is satisfactory. Of one thing the teacher may be sure: Every day spent in the study of ethics will be thoroughly worth while.

SUBJECTS FOR ORAL AND WRITTEN COMPOSITION OF ETHICAL VALUE

I. General problems:

- a. What is meant by ethics? Why should we study it?
- b. What is the meaning of "Morality"? Notice the derivation of the word.
- c. What is your definition of "Conscience"?
- d. Why are there conflicts between duty and inclination? Illustrate.
- e. What virtues do you most admire in a person's character?
- f. From what motives do men act?
- g. Do moral acts always bring happiness? Explain.

II. Personal morality:

- a. The importance of health.
 1. Why is physical efficiency a moral duty? Illustrate.
 2. What is the moral value of athletics?
 3. Is it wrong to smoke?
 4. Is idleness ever justifiable?
- b. The use of material things.
 1. What moral problem is involved in the spending of money?
 2. In the matter of amusement? Are Americans amusement-crazy?
 3. In the question of dress?
 4. Adam Smith, in the "Wealth of Nations," maintains that a certain amount of luxury is justifiable. Why?

c. Fellowship:

1. Am I "My brother's keeper"?
2. Why do we tolerate what is wrong rather than report? When is it a duty to tell?
3. What do we owe those about us?
4. What should be our attitude toward authority?
5. What do we owe our parents?
6. "Who is my neighbor"?

d. Truthfulness:

1. Is it ever right to tell a lie?
2. In what directions are our standards of truthfulness low?

e. "Ruling our spirits":

1. Can you suggest ways of learning self-control.
2. How can one train his will-power?
3. Is it true that "character is destiny"? What do you think of the statement:
"I am the master of my fate,
I am the captain of my soul."

f. Religion:

1. What is religion?
2. Do you see a relation between science and religion?
3. Why do we need religion?
4. Why do we need to go to church?

g. Happiness:

1. What pieces of literature have you read which suggest the secret of happiness?
What do you consider the key to happiness?
2. What did Jesus mean by "losing your life to save it"?

III. Public morality:

a. Patriotism:

1. What are the duties of the citizen?
2. What do we owe the next generation?

b. Social welfare:

1. What is the duty of the state toward crime?
2. Toward poverty and inadequate living conditions?

- c. Industrial problems:
 - 1. Duties of the employer?
 - 2. Duties of the employee?
 - 3. What moral principles are involved in trusts? Trade unions? Strikes? Free trade and protection?
- d. Liberty and equality?
 - 1. Should existing laws always be obeyed? What is our duty regarding the law we disapprove of?
 - 2. What is real liberty?
 - 3. What is "Feminism"?
 - a. What do women want?
 - b. What can women do to improve the moral conditions under which we live?
 - c. Why do women need the vote?
 - d. Do you believe in "Equal pay for equal work"?
- e. International morality:
 - 1. Should we restrict immigration? Explain.
 - 2. What moral principles are involved in the League of Nations?
 - 3. What did Tolstoi mean by his wish to be "a citizen of the world"?
 - 4. What about the man who says: "I don't believe in Foreign Missions"?

IV. Some great ethical teachers:

- a. Who were the following and for what great teachings were they famous?
 - 1. Confucius.
 - 2. Moses.
 - 3. Socrates.
 - 4. Plato.
 - 5. Epictetus.
 - 6. Marcus Aurelius.
 - 7. St. Francis of Assisi.
- b. Why are the teachings of Jesus considered the greatest of all ethical systems?

V. The future:

- a. How can the state better human environment?
- b. Can you suggest ways of extending or improving public education?
- d. What do you consider the gravest moral dangers of our time?

A COURSE IN ETHICS: BIBLIOGRAPHY

Peters: *Human Conduct*. Baldwin: *Education and Citizenship*. Conde: *The Business of Being a Friend*. Foster: *Should Students Study?* Bennett: *How to Live on Twenty-four Hours a Day*. Cabot: *A Course in Citizenship and Patriotism*. Cabot: *Everyday Ethics*. Cabot: *What Men Live By*. Eliot: *Training for an Effective Life*. Gulick: *Mind and Work*. Hagedorn: *You Are the Hope of the World*. James: *On Some of Life's Ideals*. King: *Rational Living*. Moore: *Youth and the Nation*. Myers: *History as Past Ethics*. Tufts: *The Real Business of Living*. Peabody: *The Approach to the Social Question*. Veblen: *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. Wells: *Social Forces in England and America*. Leacock: *Elements of Political Science*. Hall: *Immigration*. Austin: *The Young Woman Citizen*. Wilson: *The New Freedom*. Burch and Nearing: *Elements of Economics*. Towne: *Social Problems*. Burch and Patterson: *American Social Problems*. Ross: *The Old World in the New*. Rowe: *Society: Its Origin and Development*. Richmond: *The Good Neighbor*. Riis: *The Children of the Poor*. Spahr: *America's Working People*. Clark and Wyatt: *Making Both Ends Meet*. Hillis: *A Man's Value to Society*. Spargo: *The Bitter Cry of the Children*. Royce: *Studies of Good and Evil*. Black: *Happiness*. Black: *Friendship*. Plato: *Dialogues*. Gardiner: *The Bible as English Literature*. Phelps: *Reading the Bible*. Calkins: *A First Book in Psychology*.

LAURA V. EDWARDS,

Glenville High School, Cleveland, O.

ON GROWING STALE

Another letter has come asking for the "course of study in English" in the Newton Technical High School. Our last visitor wanted our "course" in American Literature. A publisher said to us recently: "Put into the book plenty of questions and composition topics. Let us print all the "courses of study" that you know have worked. Make it fool-proof and we can sell it by the thousand!"

It is perfectly natural for us who teach English to get into ruts. The machine runs easier so and doesn't need much steering. Our lives are crowded with extra-classroom activities,—debating, dramatics, the school-paper, declama-

tions, and what not. Theme-correcting takes most of the time that is left. We start fresh every September with splendid resolutions to do some of the things we left undone last year. We struggle to break away from old practices and old traditions that have begun to wear thin. But as we get older, as our classes grow larger and perhaps less stimulating, the struggle becomes more and more difficult. The ruts have deepened and hardened until it is almost impossible to do anything new.

"Courses of study" generally are an unmitigated curse. They stand for form, regularity, prescription. They are the letter that killeth the spirit of originality and variety. Carried out to their extreme of perfection they demand that you shall spend exactly ten lessons on "Silas Marner" in October and three on the semi-colon in February. They make it possible for you to teach the same books, just at the same season of the year, with the almost inevitable result that you ask the same questions in the same tone of voice. If you are not careful you finally become offended if you do not receive exactly the same answers each time.

We have no printed English "course of study" in the Newton Technical High School. We can't, because it changes every year. We have highly resolved together not to grow stale. The longer we teach,—and most of us have taught at least twenty years,—the more convinced we are that form and prescription are shackles we cannot afford to wear. To keep young, fresh, and open-minded, we believe, is a duty we owe our pupils and ourselves.

For one thing, we do not have, as in some schools, freshman, sophomore, junior and senior teachers of English. With one or two exceptions every instructor must try her skill, as the years pass, with pupils of all the classes. The head of the Department has taken this past season a division of freshman boys; one experienced teacher, by chance, has had divisions in every class of the school; another who has done work largely with the younger pupils is next fall to tackle the senior English problem. This, you will say, is a great waste of energy and all contrary to the modern demand for specialization. Not at all. It creates energy rather than wastes it. It keeps eternally open the doors of new experiences, new thoughts, new devices. As for specialization, we educators have gone perhaps too far in our pursuit of this fetish. Carried to its logical extreme, as of course it never is, this passion for specializing would find in a

large high school one teacher going about the building to do all the teaching of *Marmion*, another to do all the teaching of Shakespeare, and so on. Much wiser is the plan, being tried more and more, of giving occasionally to teachers of English a class in history or Latin or French. Good. Let it be basketball, or dancing, or plumbing,—anything to keep us wide-awake, alert, enthusiastic, keenly alive to all that is interesting to boys and girls. Single-track minds are just as inadequate for us in secondary schools as for presidents.

Then again it is an unwritten law in our department that every instructor during each school year shall teach at least one book she has never taught before. Rather than being a hardship, we find this requirement a source of pleasure and inspiration. Of course it drives us away from the narrow prescribed limits of the old familiar list. That is good. It also keeps us all constantly alert to find new material of sufficient merit to warrant classroom teaching. That is better still. Gradually our library stockroom is accumulating, in sets of thirty-five or forty copies, essays, stories, novels, biographies, plays, books of travel,—found, to be sure, on no college requirement list, nor on the lists of most high schools,—but all of them books which we have found most enjoyable to teach and thoroughly worth while for our pupils. At any rate, they are in constant use. Especially are they valuable to fill in the short gaps between intensive study of the more serious classics. As outside or correlated reading they play a valuable role; and toward the end of the year, when things begin to drag a bit, they are indispensable. Moreover, each teacher in the department is free at any time to recommend the purchase of a set of new books she would like to teach. A library fund, earned by teachers and pupils together, makes it possible to meet practically every such recommendation.

Lack of space prevents our giving here a complete list of these "sets" in our library stockroom. Three will be sufficient to illustrate their scope and character.

1. *America at Work*: Joseph Husband; Houghton, Mifflin Co. Short, stirring, brilliant essays on great achievements of modern industry and engineering. Not technical, but rather poetic and keenly imaginative. Style, admirable. Appeal to boys of sixteen especially. Try them!

2. *Short Stories of the New America*: Selected by Miss Mary Laselle: Henry Holt & Co. Recent short stories that

show the appeal of America and American ideals to those who have of late come to our shores. Not the usual formal collection beginning with Poe and ending with Kipling. Reported by every teacher as most successful.

3. *Heroes of Every Day Life*: Selected by Fanny E. Co.; Ginn & Co. Excellent for freshman boys of the sort who can't do much with *The Lady of the Lake*. Stimulating for oral themes and class discussion. Not great, but good as "filler."

Others which have proved their worth with various classes are: London: *The Call of the Wild*; Churchill: *The Crisis*; Jackson: *Ramona*; Blackmore; *Lorna Doone*; Cooper: *Deerslayer* (abridged), Ginn & Co.; Grenfell: *Adrift on An Ice Pan*; Husband: *A Year in a Coal Mine*; Hopkinson Smith: *Capt. Thomas A. Scott*; Forman: *Stories of Useful Inventions*; Finnemore: *Japan* (in series "Peeps at Many Lands"); *Courageous Girls Retold from St. Nicholas*: Century Co.; Marden: *The Young Man Entering Business*; Lubbock: *The Pleasures of Life*; Parton: *Captains of Industry*; Moore: *Abraham Lincoln for Boys and Girls*; several collections of short stories and letters.

—The Editor.

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